

REFORMS COME SLOWLY

Mr. Settle Discusses the Slowness of Accomplishing Reform and Necessity for Steadfastness

Editor Independent: Since the white man left the "rough stone age" there have been countless questions relative to a more advanced state of civilization which have been fought out and settled in such a manner as to best accomplish their design.

Reference to almost any of the great questions which have engaged the attention of the leading men of all ages will reveal the fact that regardless of the justice or injustice of a given question it is very liable at first to meet the disapproval of a very great number if not a majority of the people to be benefited by its solution. I have no desire to undertake the stupendous task of dispensing with the liability of present day questions taking the same course others have taken, but as one of the humble members of society, as one who cannot and does not desire to escape the effect of legislation, good or bad, I deem it my duty to occupy my humble position in life as advantageously as possible. One of the reasons (and I think the best one) why I am willing to endure bad laws for a time is because bad laws when fairly tested will render good ones more permanent when they appear. In my judgment no one can be excused for neglecting or refusing to play his part, no matter how little, in bringing about such legislation as will be commensurate to the needs of the people. While American citizens enjoy privileges, they also owe to their country, their representatives and themselves countless duties of which this participation in the solution of pending problems is one of the most imperative, being second only to obedience to laws which have been thereby made possible. A realization of this duty ought to impel every man to action.

At this time and in fact since the establishment of our government the money question has been wanting attention. It is receiving attention and will continue to receive it, just so long as it remains the acknowledged medium of trade. Some claim that the question is dead. Those who are most persistent in the claim are the ones who know best that it is neither dead, dying or sick.

Should those who cling to the gold standard idea remain in power, it cannot die, since it will require constant action upon their part to maintain that power. Should they lose their power it cannot die for the opposition will upon its assumption of control proceed to action believed by it to be more in accord with the wants of the times. So in either case the money question will not and cannot die. It would seem that those who have been so credulous as to believe in the alleged death of this question are very unmindful of the fact that much time is always required in the accomplishment of any great reform.

During the reign of Henry II. of England the way was opened for some constitutional amendments the effect of which is felt by the subjects of the British crown today. Henry II. made repeated attempts to enforce the constitutions of Clarendon to the end that he might establish a more just and equitable system of administration of justice. The Historian Montgomery says his effort "though baffled was not wholly lost; like seed buried in the soil, it sprang up and bore good fruit in later generations." The king reigned from 1154 to 1189, a period of thirty-five years, and never lived to see his works bear fruit. I wonder if the eminent men of his realm did not boast over the death of his reforms.

The history of England reveals the

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fact that from the first invasion of Caesar, 55 B. C., to the battle of Lewes between King Henry III. and his brother-in-law, Simon De Montpart, fought A. D. 1264, there was an unceasing struggle upon the part of the people to obtain justice at the hands of their rulers. True, it cannot be said that they received it in full at this date, but this appears to be the point in history where the king was successfully "bridled." Where parliament and the king began to lose some of their unjust powers. Where it became possible for a truly representative body to assemble. This was a reform that had been sought for thirteen hundred years, possibly longer. Now consider the reverses suffered during this period. View the times when despots claimed the divine right to rule as they pleased. See the number of lives lost in the continued struggle to bring about one reform. The convention called by "Sir Simon the righteous" in the winter of 1265 was the nucleus of what Lincoln called "a government of the people, by the people, for the people," was never realized until the ratification of the constitution of the United States.

As important as it was for the common people to be represented by those who were directly responsible to them, they did not jump at and embrace the idea suddenly, but every inch of ground between those who favored and those who opposed the house of commons was bitterly contested. I think I can guess what the result would have been, had the friends of representation accepted as final, the reverses suffered by them. Again in 1477 when William Caxton introduced to England the art of printing the most religious and best educated men of that day called it the "black art" and alleged that it had its origin with the devil. The monks opposed it on the grounds that it would destroy the copying trade. So it can be seen that selfish consideration will sometimes cause men to interpose serious objections to measures of reform calculated to benefit a number of people much greater than the number offering the objection. I am not willing to believe that men even at this late day enjoy a supernatural endowment which enables them to rise above selfishness in every case. Other evidence and by no means irrelevant evidence is to be found in the fact that the great habeas corpus ad subjiciendum act passed under the reign of Charles II. in 1679 by no means received the support of all who were to be benefited by it. Certain it is that some found fault with it and even expressed a desire to have it repealed. So it will be seen that it is not always a selfish motive that prompts men to combat a reform movement, but may very well be ignorance of the beneficent results to be obtained.

But I shall not confine myself to English history for further citations. I think I should weary in so doing. A glance at the dark period covering the alternate rising and falling of justice in Great Britain causes one's soul to revolt. The only reason I can get consent of my mind to peruse those gloomy pages is to better enable me to enjoy the benign offerings of a republic. There the concurrent action of the common people and their rulers often extinguished the light of noble souls. Here the grief over the loss of great men has always been shared by all, regardless of party affiliation.

There the aim has been to extort as much money as possible from the people who needed it most. Here the great object has almost always been to save to the people as much of their earnings as possible. There the great desire has in a majority of instances been to keep the government as far from the people as possible. Here the efforts of all are to bring the government as near the people as practicable. There they have claimed to rule by divine right. Here they have always acknowledged the supremacy of the people and looked to them for the right to rule. There they have breathed the spirit of an empire propped up with bayonets. Here they breathe the pure air and drink the crystal waters of a republic resting upon the will of the people. There the ruler has always governed the people. Here the people have always governed the ruler. I shall therefore pass into the period beginning about the year 1776. I do not wish it understood that even in the republic of the United States all was harmony and equilibrium of interests. There have been dissensions; there have been disagreements; there have been wars. But between the enjoyment of liberty in England and the United States there is no comparison. Perhaps I should say very little comparison at most.

The adoption of our present constitution depended upon an agreement among its framers upon some great

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questions. Beginning with the memorable convention that was organized May 25, 1787, we find our government confronted by some intricate problems. Some of the problems grappled with by this convention were not solved for many years. The slavery question rose to such a height as to cause serious alarm. Attaching to it were the difficulties of representation and the proper distribution of political power. A heavy storm hung over the convention; so heavy in fact that some of the most accomplished men of the assembly despaired of a successful termination of it. One writer says of that body that it was "scarce held together by the strength of a hair."

Washington repented of having allowed himself to be persuaded into the work. Another great question to be dealt with was where to fix the line between general and local governments. State rights and privileges had to be properly empowered. Then when the government began proceedings under the constitution, let us remember how it was received. When the effort was made to collect the excise tax in Pennsylvania the idea was received with contempt. The authority of the government was disputed and defied. Armed resistance was decided upon. The position of the insurgents, the justice or injustice of the tax is not to be questioned here. The insurrection is cited because it affords evidence in support of the claim that it requires time and study to bring about even a small measure of reform.

If it be doubted, however, that it was an instance of reform I offer as testimony, the language of Mr. Hamilton concerning the signing of the constitution under which the tax was levied. In the convention referred to he rose and said: "No man's ideas are more remote from the plan than my own are known to be; but is it possible to deliberate between anarchy and convulsion on one side and the chances of good to be expected from the plan on the other?" Is it not reform to pass from anarchy and convulsion to good government were not the insurgents opposing the reform? Conscientious opposition it was, no doubt, but opposition nevertheless. Yet it has been said that others received the new constitution with instructive joyfulness. Another question and I shall offer no more. Slavery!—the word is not to be found in the constitution. When the great so-

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cial reform was begun no alteration was needed to empower the states to abolish the institution. This question is so familiar as to render details unnecessary.

All know that from the beginning of the operation of the general government the question was sometimes hot and other times cold. There remained a diversity of opinions concerning it throughout the period. Its adjustment has cost thousands of lives and millions of dollars. It cannot be said even now that all faith in the principle for which the southern confederacy fought has been destroyed.

These historical storms are not offered for the educated. They are presumed to know of them and to be able to gather from them whatever benefit the common people; as one practically uneducated, I offer them to the readers of The Independent and others of my class, in hope of enabling some to take consolation from them. To me all such instances as the foregoing afford abundant proof that temporary defeat must not be taken as permanent conclusion when we are dealing

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